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ABSTRACT

An assessment of two pilot accelerated schools using the inquiry process model for the transformation of school culture and classroom practices in serving at-risk students is presented in this report. The inquiry process is a central feature of the accelerated school, a comprehensive school renewal initiative. The traditional approach to changing educational practice, staff development, is ineffective in that it fails to include transformation of the school culture. The accelerated school vision is based on university-school collaboration, three guiding principles (unity of purpose, empowerment, and building on strengths), and four values (participation, communication, reflection, and experimentation). Pilot school results include increased participant inquiry, school-sponsored community meetings, and changes in the retention policy. Implications for staff development planning include analysis of the school as an organization, recognition of the school community as a knowledge resource, and empowerment of teachers and parents. (26 references) (LMI)

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ACCELERATED SCHOOLS: THE INQUIRY PROCESS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

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ACCELERATED SCHOOLS: THE INQUIRY PROCESS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR SCHOOL CHANGE

Introduction

Nearly one million students dropped out of school last year. Another one million are expected to leave before graduating this year. If trends persist, we can assume that 12 million children in school today are at risk of never finishing high school, never attending college, never participating in the primary job market, and never knowing the opportunities that most of us take for granted (MDC, 1988). We argue that these school failures are just that: the failures of schools to provide an exciting and worthwhile learning experience for all students. Accordingly, we define "at-risk" students as those who lack the family, home, and community resources needed to succeed in schools *as schools are currently constituted* (Levin, 1988). This fundamental mismatch between student backgrounds and the current organization of schools is the chief concern of this paper.

School failure is not unique to any particular ethnic group, socioeconomic class, or geographic region. While at-risk students are concentrated among minority, immigrant, single parent, urban, and poor populations, many students from these populations are not at risk. The converse is true. Many students without these background characteristics are also at-risk of school failure. Scholars and layman alike must take care not to stereotype children by these background characteristics in a way that needlessly precludes their educational success (Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister, & Rogers, 1990; Levin, 1988). The more telling characteristic of at-risk children is substandard academic performance. Berlin and Sum observe that, "If we want to reach the lowest-scoring dropouts who constitute the core of the dropout problem, we must address the syndrome that is the major cause of their leaving school: low achievement, falling behind modal grade, poor performance, and a sense that they cannot keep up with their peers" (Berlin & Sum, 1988).

Moreover, this problem is not likely to relieve itself. The number and percentage of children entering the school system from historically at risk populations is on the rise. The United States is absorbing an extraordinary

number of immigrants from some of the poorest countries in Asia and Latin America. The birth rates of families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is much higher than families from historically lower risk groups. And the number of children born in poverty or dysfunctional homes is increasing rapidly (Levin, 1986). We are encouraged, but not comforted, by the apparent growing awareness of business and community leaders, elected officials, and the public at large of the dire economic and social consequences if we fail to respond to the needs of these and all students now.

Before we can even respond to this challenge, we face an equally daunting, but prerequisite one: recreating schools. Prominent scholars such as John Goodlad, Theodore Sizer, and others are arriving at the same conclusion: existing organizational, instructional, and curricular practices are stunting the intellectual growth of an alarming number of students, especially those most at-risk. Larry Cuban (1988) and Seymore Sarason (1971) drop the other shoe: Schools are not prone to change. The prevailing response in recent years to the twin challenges of improving the educational outcomes of at-risk students and affecting school change is through staff development programming. The question for us becomes: What have we learned from research, practice, and our experience with the Accelerated Schools Project that might guide the development of more effective professional development models for teachers working with at risk students?

The Enemy Among Us

In the words of the immortal Pogo, "We has [sic] met the enemy, and it is us."[1] The list of counterproductive pedagogical practices identified by practitioners and scholars is long and formidable indeed. Let us take one of the more insidious examples: ability grouping.

Jeannie Oakes (1985), among others, builds a strong case against the efficacy of tracking, that is, grouping students by ability level. Her case is more compelling in that it is one of the few studies based on extensive classroom observations. She critically examines the most frequently made arguments for tracking and discredits each one. For instance,

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[1]AKA Cartoonist Walter Kelly

conventional wisdom holds that students learn more and better in homogeneous groups; however, studies clearly show that no group of students -- whether high or low ability -- benefits consistently from being grouped homogeneously. Then she illustrates how ability grouping systematically dashes the academic hopes and prowess of low track students. She documents how ability grouping shapes the teacher's attitudes about the abilities of students, how it shapes a student's attitude about his or her own abilities, and how it provides an excuse for delivering very different academic and psychological experiences for different tracks of students. She found that "high status" knowledge (e.g., problem solving skills, conceptual schemes, exposure to the "classics") and active instructional programs (e.g., hands-on exercises, cooperative learning experiences, open student discussions) are withheld from lower track students. Moreover, teachers have different behavioral expectations of lower track students (e.g., encouraging more docile and submissive conduct). In short, ability grouping unwittingly limits the intellectual opportunities for lower track students -- a perverse result given that it is these students who need the most stimulation. The system virtually guarantees the failure of those unfortunate enough to be labeled "lower ability," however that designation is determined.

What is frightening is how long this practice has continued without examination. Oakes speculates that many such practices become entrenched as a matter of habit. Teachers shrug, "That's the way it's always been done." At-risk students are a hostage of the uncritical and unreflective attitudes, beliefs, and values of the education system and the public that supports it. Established school practices, such as tracking, are difficult to dislodge, even when found objectionable, because they are woven into the very fabric of schooling, defined by master schedules, teachers assignments, and textbooks. We agree with Oakes and her colleagues, and propose that remedial or compensatory approaches, part of the same pedagogical genre as tracking, block student achievement by lowering expectations and slowing down the pace of instruction (Levin, 1987). A consensus on this research issue is developing. The next question is how to respond? How do we better serve students at-risk? How do we recreate schools? How can professional development programs help?

We argue in this paper that the dominant approach to changing educational practice—teacher inservices, workshops, or "make it-take it" faires—are ineffective and trivial when stacked against the central challenges facing educators today (Little, Gerritz, Stern, Guthrie, Kirst, & Marsh, 1987). The connection between the inservice and the classroom experience is simply not being made. Moreover, we support the view that classroom practices are defined, sustained, and regulated in fundamental ways by deeply-rooted belief systems, patterns of interaction, and organizational arrangements particular to given schools and districts. *Meaningful and lasting changes can be affected only when they are considered within a broader context of school renewal that encourages the critical exploration and ultimate transformation of the school's culture, including, but not limited to its pedagogical practices* (Rogers & Polkinghorn, 1989).

The purpose of this paper is to share a model—the Inquiry Process—for transforming school culture and changing classroom practices in schools serving at-risk children. The Inquiry Process is a central feature of the Accelerated School--a comprehensive school renewal initiative pioneered by Stanford Professor Henry M. Levin.

We begin by noting why traditional staff development programs have failed to promote lasting school changes generally, and then, narrow the focus to look more closely at change processes in schools serving large numbers of students at-risk. Then, we describe the Accelerated School model and how this model provides a framework--which we call the Inquiry Process--for examining school culture and transforming educational practices. Some illustrations are provided of how the Inquiry Process has worked in one accelerated elementary school in the San Francisco Bay Area. Finally, we list some guiding principles and likely challenges for practitioners interested in integrating the Inquiry Process with staff development programming at their school and comment on the promise of some recent innovations in staff development programs in California.

Changing Educational Practice: The Standard

Concerns about educational quality in the last decade triggered numerous reforms designed to make teachers and schools more effective. The first set of reforms, sparked by the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), have been characterized as structural in nature. For instance, the states responded to this national report by mandating more and longer school days, requiring additional courses for high school graduation, and devoting more attention to the "basics," e.g., the traditional academic subjects. These reforms directed teachers to devote more time for instruction and to maximize student time on task. Unfortunately, these initial reforms overlooked the special circumstances of many students. The results were predictable. One study found that only 15 of 54 state commissions responding to the Excellence in Education movement had so much as one recommendation aimed at high risk students (MDC, 1988). Former Secretary of Education Terrel Bell conceded that the school reform movement benefitted about 70 percent of the students. "The other 30 percent are low-income, minority students and we are still not effectively educating them"(MDC, 1988, p. 4).

A second set of reforms, sparked by the publication of *A Nation Prepared* (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986), focussed on "creating a profession equal to the task" of educational reform. This report proposed a radical restructuring of the teaching profession to produce more classroom leaders -- teachers who were better prepared and capable of exercising their professional judgment in the context of their own classrooms. The report envisioned teachers who would lead other teachers in curricular and instructional reforms; teachers who would be sensitive to the needs of all students; teachers who would develop and share the expertise to reach and teach every last student. This reform movement is still in its infancy with a mixed prognosis.

More recently, the groundwork for a third set of reforms has been laid. This set finally brings students to the forefront. It is recognizable in the work of James Comer, Henry Levin, and others who warn that the diversity in the classroom -- in terms of students' social, cultural, economic, and academic backgrounds -- requires a significant re-conceptualization of schooling. These initiatives call for far more complex instructional approaches—ones that promote inquiry, active learning, group cooperation, and social cohesion in a heterogeneous classroom

(Marsh & Odden, forthcoming). This shift in focus raises a promising set of possibilities—particularly for students at-risk.

Nonetheless, the challenge of changing deeply rooted instructional practices has stumped practitioners and researchers for decades. Whether top-down, bottom-up, mandated, induced, or bully-pulpitted, proposed reforms never seemed to reach the classrooms. The particular vehicle for implementing the reforms seemed to make little difference. Today, the standard for changing what teachers do and for school improvement can be summed up in two words: *staff development* (Fullan, 1990).

Conceived broadly, staff development includes any activity or process intended to improve the skills, understandings, or performance of employees in present or future roles (Fullan, 1990, p. 3). Current staff development programs for teachers usually take one of two forms: skills-oriented inservices or materials-oriented (i.e., "make it—take it") workshops (Little, et al., 1987). We question the wisdom of relying on these models as the primary means for changing classroom practices. A recent study in California underscores our concern.

Staff Development in California

Until as recently as 15 years ago, very few school districts acknowledged their responsibility for the academic or clinical health of their teachers (Joyce, 1990). California was no exception. Today, however, in the broader context of school reform, California makes a substantial commitment to staff development for teachers.

Resources for programs and activities administered by all education agencies in California approach $360 million a year. In addition, individual districts accrue nearly $600 million annually in the form of future salary obligations to teachers who complete inservice training. Teachers themselves devote countless hours in volunteer time—usually after school and on weekends—to improve their knowledge and skills without financial benefit (Little, et al., 1987).

One would think that this broad level of investment in staff development would yield substantial returns—consistent with the nature of the challenge outlined above—in the classroom. Unfortunately, the most comprehensive assessment of staff development in California to date

suggests just the opposite (Little, et al., 1987). Consider the following findings:

> ...the current array of staff development activities and incentives is *unlikely to yield substantial change* [emphasis added] in the thinking or performance of California's classroom teachers (p. 7).
>
> California's staff development resources are deployed in ways that generally reinforce *existing patterns of teaching* [emphasis added], conventional structures of schools, and longstanding traditions of the teaching occupation (p. 8).
>
> California's staff development activities are largely unevaluated...consequences are almost never tested at the classroom level (p. 9).

While these findings may cause us to pause, they are not particularly surprising to anyone familiar with the literatures on school change and staff development.

The More Things Change, The More They Remain The Same...

Numerous writers, beginning, perhaps, with Seymore Sarason (1971) and his notion of school "regularities," have provided thoughtful commentary on the resiliency of basic schooling practices to change efforts. These authors contend that school culture plays a powerful role in inhibiting or enabling school change. Staff development programs that ignore school culture or treat it as a "given" hold little promise for affecting change. Several thoughtful observers echo this sentiment.

Larry Cuban (1988) speaks of a puzzle—a fundamental contradiction: "long-term stability amid constant change." How can it be, wonders Cuban, that so much school reform has taken place over the last century, yet school appears to be pretty much the same as it was nearly a century ago? Cuban argues that most school reform initiatives since the turn of the century have sought to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of schools without *substantially altering the ways in which adults and children perform their roles.*

Paul Heckman, Jeannie Oakes, and Kenneth Sirotnik (1983) suggest that the underlying cultural elements in a school—Sarason's

regularities—exercise extraordinary influence on schooling practices and give rise to a "natural order" that makes change exceedingly difficult. Heckman observes that staff development programs rarely challenge this order. As a result, *such efforts are unlikely to effect changes that are anything but trivial.*

Albert Shanker (1990) argues that staff development, the scaffolding built around current school structures, can not by itself rebuild schools. He examines several cultural elements—underlying beliefs or premises—that lock staff development programs into the old order, rather than cultivating a new culture where experimentation and change become the norms. These old habits of thought include the notion that the most valuable knowledge about teaching exists outside the teacher and the classroom; that the most effective means for teaching teachers is to tell them; and, that the more inservices and workshops teachers attend the better.

One thing seems certain: Changing classroom practice in any school is a formidable task, but the challenge is nearly impossible if reformers and teachers neglect the critical importance of school culture. The significance of this realization is not lost on schools serving majority populations of at-risk students. In fact, the unique cultural elements of these schools demand our special attention.

The Challenge of Change in Schools Serving At-Risk Students

When policy analysts, legislators, school administrators, and others perceive a "problem with the schools," the typical response is to multiply programs and regulations. This logic, which parallels the reactive staff development schemes described above, has created what one observer calls "a patchwork of programs designed to meet various—and often competing—demands" (Timar, 1989). In many schools, these programs have a life of their own. They define patterns of interaction among teachers and students, atomize school programs and functions, and reinforce negative and erroneous assumptions about at-risk students. To give a conspicuous example, compensatory or remedial programs require students to be pulled from regular classrooms and sequestered in special rooms with special teachers. Moreover, they drive home the notion that a

slower pace of learning and a "basic" (i.e., non-thinking) curriculum is, after all, more humane and in the *child's* best interest.

The schools most frequently targeted for these "antidotes" are those serving high numbers of at-risk students. The organizational landscape of these schools is littered with mandates, programs, rules, paperwork, and other artifacts of this confounding logic of "school fixing." Teachers learn to tolerate the extra trouble caused by categorical programs because they are told that additional resources depend on their acquiesence. However, additional dollars almost always come with more accountability. Most schools serving at-risk students operate within a tangled, paralyzing web of categorical programs and accountability requirements.

Untangling this web to affect fundamental change is difficult for three reasons. First, categorical programs signal to the school community, district officials, and parents that the school is actually *doing something* for children with special needs. Despite the inherent contradictions ("helping" students by slowing down their learning) and lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of these programs, schools themselves often come to believe in the worthiness of these programs. To eliminate them, no matter how cumbersome or unwieldy they may be, sends the wrong message to constituents and reveals internal inconsistencies that are better left alone, especially if new remedies are not forthcoming.

Second, categorical resources are invariably tied to people—frequently teacher specialists or instructional aides who staff programs and assist in the classrooms. Eliminating such programs means letting go of entrenched "support" systems. It also means that trusted colleagues may be out of a job. Few are willing to bite that bullet—no matter how incongruent these special programs may be with personal and professional belief systems.

Finally, compensatory programs consume schools, and the time and energy of people in them. Extraordinary attention must be invested to comply with rules, to schedule and monitor students, to coordinate with classroom teachers (assuming this is done), to prepare for program reviews, to fill out paperwork, to resubmit applications for next year's funds, etc. What is remarkable is that the teacher finds time and energy to do any independent thinking and reflection at all!

The palpable emphasis on routine, control, and external authority that is associated with special programs for at-risk students leaves little room for teachers to regain their authority, evaluate practices, or re-examine their mission. Change efforts are screened carefully to ensure they do not threaten existing programs, personnel schemes, or belief systems. In short, they must "fit" into what already exists and be easy for teachers to accommodate. Results of new efforts, often packaged in staff development programs, must promote immediate, observable, "easy to count" changes, like those provided by "teacher-proof" curricular material, new tracking and labeling schemes, or sophisticated (i.e., arcane) diagnostic routines and services.

The truth is that classroom teachers, facing some of the toughest challenges, teach in schools that systematically constrain the critical examination of the school as an organization and a culture. This distressing and wide-spread phenomenon speaks to the challenge that inspired the Accelerated School.

The Accelerated School

The Accelerated School is a comprehensive school renewal effort founded on the following premises: 1) schools, as they are presently constituted, do not—cannot—meet the needs of at-risk students, and 2) existing staff development efforts are inadequate and limited in their capacity to alter the systemic problems of schools serving large populations of at-risk students.

Driven by compelling evidence that at-risk students were the fastest growing segment of the K-12 population and that the students' preparation or readiness for school was eroding with each entering cohort, we asked: What might a school look like if it *were* addressing the needs of at-risk students? More specifically, what policies would guide its operation, how would people and programs be organized, and what basic principles and values would define the school culture?

The notion of acceleration captured much of what we envisioned in terms of a school and program for at-risk students. Acceleration, in an educational context, has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it is *symbolic* of power, movement, and energy -- eliciting images of breaking through

barriers to achieve the unthinkable. On the other, it is based in the *actual* resetting of learning trajectories that describe typical achievement patterns for students at-risk. In this way, acceleration confronts a view of schooling and learning concerned primarily with limits—of the learner, the teacher, and the community—and gives rise to a new vision which focuses on all the possibilities.

Translating the Vision

The promise of such a vision raises the question of how acceleration can be translated into meaningful terms for educators, students, and parents. Or, as our Symposium title puts it, "But What Do We Do If We Don't Track?" Clearly the challenge to accelerate the curriculum for schools serving at-risk children suggests systemic change in school culture and practice.[2] We find the current school transformation model wholly inadequate for the task. Most school change initiatives follow the research, development, and dissemination model—what some commentators term RD&D.[3] In this model, outside observers identify some problem with schools and create a programmatic response that they inject into the schools. Pitting researchers against the school community, this approach "suggests that knowledge comes from experts and is to be handed to practitioners" (Sirotnik & Clark, 1988), 1983, p. 661). The schools become "passive targets" for haphazard and opportunistic innovations (Heckman, Oakes, & Sirotnik, 1983, p. 29).

Our translation of an accelerated vision is not based on a singular response, a new text, or a "one size fits all" package. Rather, it is based on genuine university-school collaboration, three guiding principles, and a concomitant set of values. The collaboration, principles, and values lay the foundation for transforming, over a period of some five to seven years, both the school culture and educational practices of teachers serving at-risk students.

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[2] Larry Cuban refers to such fundamental change as second order . See generally: Cuban. "A Fundamental Puzzle of School Reform"

[3] See for example: Paul Heckman, Jeannie Oakes, & Kenneth Sirotnik. "Expanding the Concepts of School Renewal and Change"

Guiding Principles and Values for an Accelerated School

The guiding principles for an Accelerated School include: *unity of purpose* which refers to agreement among parents, students, and teachers on a common set of goals for all students that become the focal point for everyone's efforts; *empowerment* which refers to the ability of key participants to make important decisions at the school level and in the home to improve the education of students; and, *building on strengths* which refers to utilizing all the learning resources that students, parents, school staff and communities bring to the educational endeavor (Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister, & Rogers, 1990). These principles practiced together should abate the tendency of administrators, teachers, and parents to blame each other or factors "beyond their control" for existing achievement patterns

Underlying these principles are a set of values which support the transformation of the school's culture and educational practices. These include: *participation* which implies that teachers, students, and parents should be involved in all facets of the change process; *communication* which fosters the exchange of ideas, talents, and information between members of the school community; *reflection* which involves the willingness to hold beliefs in suspense, to doubt until evidence is obtained, to go where evidence points instead of favoring predetermined or easier conclusions, to use responses as hypotheses to be tested instead of as dogmas to be asserted, and to enjoy the sense of discovery and achievement in exploring new fields of inquiry and finding new puzzles to solve (Dewey, 1988); and finally, *experimentation* which suggests a way of looking at problems as well as a way to address them without knowing the outcomes in advance or holding anything sacred (Rogers & Polkinghorn, 1989). In short, schools need to become centers for what Maxine Greene (1988) refers to as "space[s] of dialogue and possibility"(p. xi). The dialogue should consider both school goals and practices in light of the unique needs of the school community. The possibilities for each school site should be endless and constantly subjected to rigorous scrutiny (Rogers & Polkinghorn, 1989).

These guiding principles and values provided the framework for two pilot Accelerated Schools in California. More specifically, they established a conceptual foundation for developing and employing the Inquiry Process—a central feature of the Accelerated School and the primary

means by which members of the school community untangle themselves from the pernicious web of regulations, programs, and practices that characterize schools serving large populations of at-risk students. That is, the Inquiry Process is means by which members of the school community break through barriers and seek their vision of acceleration.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process has shown particular promise in empowering the parents and teachers in pilot Accelerated Schools that sought to dismantle compensatory programs and remedial practices (in effect, tracking at the elementary school level) and to focus attention on structures and strategies that accelerate the educational progress of at-risk students. It can be summarized in six stages: 1) Creating a school-wide vision of an accelerated school; 2) Structuring the inquiry process within the school setting to compare present conditions with the school's vision; 3) Examining programs and practices within the school as they affect the organizing questions or problematics developed in stage two; 4) Exploring programs or models in other schools or in the research literature related to the problematics; 5) Synthesizing ideas into action plans; and, 6) Developing pilot or experimental programs and evaluating them continuously against the school's collective vision.

We advocate a more structured process because we find that a more open ended process does not push hard enough the entrenched regularities, assumptions, and beliefs gripping schools that serve predominantly at-risk student populations. Embattled teachers tend to respond to open-ended discussion in a manner familiar to the RD&D model, i.e., they seek quick fixes for immediate and isolated problems. More fundamental issues are ignored and underlying attitudes and beliefs go unchecked. Employing a structure that roughly parallels the stages of scientific inquiry provides the discipline necessary for participants to step outside of their daily concerns and take a hard look at what they are doing and why.

In addition, we believe that active and frequent collaboration between a University team and members of the school community is essential and productive for both institutions. John Goodlad (19XX) makes a similar observation in a study of School-University partnerships.

> The production of knowledge and the weighing of knowledge in making decisions are not natural activities in schools. The joining of universities with schools, as in partnerships, enhances the chances of such activities influencing the workplace without distorting the natural bent of both institutions. (p. 218-219)

The Inquiry Process in Action

A team of Stanford faculty and graduate students worked closely with two pilot elementary schools in the Bay Area as well as a number of other satellite schools around the nation.[4] The following description of the Inquiry Process is taken from our experiences with both the pilot and satellite schools. It illustrates in particular how the Inquiry Process was used by one group of teachers and parents at an elementary school in Redwood City, California.

Stage 1: Creating a vision. We began our collaborative effort by appealing to the special expertise of the teachers within our pilot school. The Stanford team initiated a dialogue with the following question: "What would you like today's kindergarten student to look like when he or she leaves the school in six years?" The response to this question led to a clear and explicit vision for the school community—a vision that emphasized the central goal of the Accelerated School: to move every at-risk student into the educational mainstream by the end of the sixth grade. To build this vision, teachers examined their individual beliefs as well as their underlying assumptions. Not only did the staff come to recognize what they shared in common, but they also saw the collective nature of their task.

Stage 2: Identifying a "problematic." In an effort to allow teachers to explore in-depth a particular set of related concerns, we created cadres of five to seven teachers (representing all grade levels) plus a facilitator from Stanford for each cluster of issues. Each cadre focused on one dimension of the school's vision. Cadre members began their work by defining "problematics," sets of questions that identified or explained potential

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[4] Levin in "Accelerated Schools After Three Years" (forthcoming in Educational *Leadership*) summarizes the different Accelerated Schools programs now in existence. To date state-wide networks in Missouri and Illinois include over thirty Accelerated Schools.

obstacles associated with fulfilling their vision. For example, one group was concerned with improving the school's math instruction. They asked: Why, on average, did their students' standardized achievement test scores in math concepts and applications gradually decline from grade two through grade six, while the scores in math computation remained at or near the national mean?

Stage 3: Looking inwards. Once a "problematic" was defined, each cadre, assisted by the Stanford collaborator, began to scrutinize existing programs and practices within the school. This pause inwards allowed teachers to reflect on their own work and the work of others at the school. Teachers observed each others' classes, surveyed parent attitudes, and interviewed other staff members and personnel from local social service organizations.

Stage 4: Looking outwards. After taking a look at programs and practices within the school, cadre members looked outside their school to see ways that other schools had addressed similar issues. Cadre members read and discussed pertinent articles from journals (some provided by the Stanford team) and heard firsthand reports about successful practices in other schools. This exposure to other schools like their own that had turned things around broadened their imaginations of what was possible at their school.

Stage 5: Synthesizing ideas into action plans. Cadre members synthesized what they knew about the problematic and designed pilot programs accordingly. Then the different cadres assembled to integrate a new program responsive to the unique needs of the students, teachers, and parents at that particular school.

Stage 6: Initiating pilot programs and evaluation. The final stage carried out the educational programs designed in Stage 5. After four to six weeks, they evaluated how each program matched their expectations for it, and refined, altered, or expanded each one to improve positive student outcomes. Thus, a pattern of continual experimentation and evaluation was built into the new school culture. Each new approach deployed was examined against the school's vision of moving every child into the educational mainstream by the end of the sixth grade. This final stage allowed teachers to reflect upon and take stock of the value of their work.

Outcomes

We have completed our second full year at the Redwood City pilot Accelerated School. Lurking in the background, as Chester Finn (1990) recently wrote, was the "specter of accountability." What had we accomplished through these many months of collaboration? Was the school's accelerated vision becoming a reality?

Larry Cuban cautioned not to callously uproot this nascent relationship with the school simply to see if was "alive and growing." Instead, he urged a more holistic, culture-based examination—looking more at how teachers and parents were framing problems rather than at whether or how well they had solved them. What were teachers and parents talking about? Were phrases such as, "What if..." replacing "We've already tried that—it doesn't work," or, "These kids can't..." This genre of questioning—or inquiry—resonated and seemed to fit well with we hoped to observe after two years. With this in mind, we observed the following:

Norm of Inquiry

A week spent exploring the school revealed that a norm of inquiry was beginning to establish itself. Teachers, along with principals and parents, were asking more questions and challenging many of the underlying and often debilitating assumptions that plague schools serving at-risk children. For example, teachers are not accepting low test scores as "that's the way it is." They want to know more about the validity of standardized tests for students at their school, and they want to explore more authentic ways to measure student learning.

Rather than adhering to the implicit authority of external mandates, the teachers, principal, and parents were learning to tap their own well of expertise and problem-solving abilities. Parents were finding that they, too, are experts who bring a unique perspective about their children and their school. All members of the school community—teachers, students, parents, and administrators—were coming to understand and support a shared vision by raising heretofore unheard of questions.

Sponsored Time

A small, but critical decision made by the principal and teachers was to sponsor time for members of the school community to meet together in inquiry groups to address vision-related challenges. This time was "created" by eliminating faculty meetings—no small feat in most schools. In the past, faculty meetings mirrored classrooms: one person standing and talking—usually passing information—with 30 others passively listening (or, in some cases, knitting, correcting papers, etc.). In short, the principal agreed to write down information he would otherwise convey at faculty meetings if the teachers agreed to read it. With this agreement in place, teachers and parents were meeting together, reframing challenges, seeking answers, and beginning to experiment with curricular and instructional strategies consonant with their vision of an Accelerated School.

Retention Policy

One of the teacher-parent inquiry groups (which included the principal) observed that first grade teachers planned to retain what the group considered to be a large number of students. The group discussed why this pattern of retention had arisen over the last few years and decided it needed more information to fully understand the problem. The group asked the school's resource teacher to review the records of students who had been retained or had been considered for retention over the past three years.

From this data, the group began to see patterns of which type of students tended to be retained and which, if any, students seemed to benefit from retention. They then consulted the literature on the subject as well as a specialist at the district office to learn more about alternatives to retention. The group finally conducted a school-wide forum on retention during one of a staff development days at which the school forged a new consensus on the use of retention.

What Would Happen If...

Teachers and parents in one inquiry group addressed the question of what would happen if all dollars currently allocated to the school for compensatory/remedial classes and personnel were redirected to support

smaller class sizes on a school-wide basis. The results were intriguing. A systematic, long term study of budgets, etc., revealed that existing class sizes, which averaged about 32, could be reduced by almost one-third if all pull-out programs were eliminated. The appeal of this notion, however, was tempered by personal investments in long-standing staffing patterns at the school. This made further exploration of possibilities sensitive and difficult. Nonetheless, the inquiry group continues to advance this notion—albeit slowly—whereas before they never contemplated such heresy.

Remaining Challenges

Our work with two pilot schools has raised a number of important, unresolved issues as they relate to improving the educational outcomes in schools serving at-risk youth:

Time. Where do busy people (teachers, principals, parents, university partners) get the time to meet, discuss, troubleshoot, experiment, evaluate, and reflect? Our experience shows that the lack of time can have the most crippling effect on the long-term momentum of real school change. Somehow, time for reflection and the inquiry process must be built into the school routine. Perhaps states and districts must consider extending contracts to accommodate more time for reflection and school development (as opposed to staff development). However accomplished, we are convinced that it is time well spent.

Federal, state, and district mandates. How can we achieve unity of purpose within an ever-changing and often contradictory environment of policy decisions and regulations? How can elementary schools dismantle pull-out programs when the funding mechanism of Chapter I all but requires separate programming for special students as defined by law? School officials often feel powerless against the endless waves of regulations and requirements that drop down from above. Currently, their best recourse is to ignore the most noxious elements of each new mandate, but only at great peril to future resource support. Some states, such as California, are proposing legislation to exempt low performing schools from most, if not all the extraneous statutes and regulations strangling them *as long as* these schools begin to show positive results within a designated time period (typically five years). Perhaps, schools and children

at-risk need an advocate in state capitals (and Washington D.C.) to push similar exempt status legislation.

Credibility. How can teachers, principals, and parents be convinced that ability grouping and similar practices do not improve the educational outcomes of *any* students? Despite a wealth of research to the contrary, teachers find it nearly impossible to believe that their task is not made easier by grouping students homogeneously. This research finding is simply counter-intuitive. Furthermore, university researchers can be easily dismissed: "They're in their Ivory Towers . . . When is the last time they have been in a *real* classroom?" We do not see any easier way for academics to increase their credibility with practitioners without spending a great deal more time with them with teachers in the "trenches."

Societal Norms. How can schools combat prevailing social norms? School culture is a reflection of broader cultural expectations, attitudes, and values. For instance, the adversarial relationship between management and labor and racism do not begin in schools, but find their manifestations there. These culturally defined norms operate as a great constraint to schools. The point is not to despair, but rather to take stock of what can and cannot be changed. To paraphrase a common prayer: "Lord, give me the strength to change what I can, the knowledge to know what I can't, and the wisdom to tell the difference." The school community should seize the power they have to shape the values of the next generation as well as to take what is given by society.

Institutionalization. How can we make changes last? How do we ensure that the spirit of inquiry remains alive within the schools? This question vexes all of us. There is a definite limit to what individuals, alone or collectively, can accomplish within institutions. Energy is far too often dispersed and consumed by trivial activities. Attention spans are short. Principals and teachers come and go. Parents and students move on. Impatience and frustration get to the best of us. We should remember, however, that the public at-large only has so much patience as well. Some educators in Chicago found this out the hard way. And society and our political, social, and economic system can only tolerate so much waste of human capital before it too turns against the educational system. Better that we strive, albeit slowly and at times unsuccessfully, than to stop caring

for an institution, that serves such critical and lofty purposes as bestowed on schools by our democratic society.

If we can successfully meet these challenges and keep our eyes on the principles of the Accelerated School, we can indeed accelerate the education of at-risk children and further the learning of their teachers, parents, and principals.

Implications for Staff Development Programming

The Inquiry Process informs staff development programming in general, and with respect to current reforms in California. In general, the Inquiry Process can be differentiated from staff development in three important ways. First, as the school seeks its vision, members of the school community use the Inquiry Process to analyze the school as an organization. This organizational analysis provides insights into powerful, school-wide "regularities" that are not typically gained through individually-centered staff development approaches to change.

Second, the Inquiry Process encourages the school community to become producers as well as a transmitters of knowledge. Such an approach is compatible with our view that most school communities possess a tremendous wealth of untapped talent and expertise that most deficit-oriented staff development programs ignore.

Finally, the Inquiry Process places the power to effect change in the hands of those most directly responsible for understanding and addressing the needs of the students—teachers and parents. Empowering key members of the school community sparks energy and imagination rather than the compliance that is frequently associated with staff development. In short, whereas staff development provides for skill building, the inquiry Process provides for capacity building. It taps existing strengths of staff and draws the community together under a single vision.

Recent state-level staff development projects in California incorporate many of the values and principles of the Accelerated School and the Inquiry Process that we have discussed. Most notably, the state legislature created six subject matter professional development projects (in writing, mathematics, science, arts, foreign languages, and literature) based on a collaborative model among institutions of postsecondary education,

community centers, school districts, and schools and administered by the Office of the President of the University of California. These projects include many of the features central to the Accelerated School and Inquiry Process.

For instance, the projects rely on teacher expertise and explicitly acknowledge the authority of the classroom in designing and implementing their programs. All the projects sponsor summer institutes for teachers that teachers help plan, lead, and share with their colleagues once they return to their schools. Concerns about mastering subject content areas and mastering instructional practices are given equal weight, and issues regarding school organization barriers are addressed explicitly. For example, most of the projects require that *teams* of teachers and administrators from the same district or school attend the summer programs together so that colleagues are always nearby when individuals need encouragement and support to effect substantive changes when they return to the classroom. In addition, each program includes an extensive academic year follow-up program to bring participants and university partners together on a regular basis to assess and plan more school changes.

These staff development programs also are linked with state-wide efforts to realign the curricular frameworks, instructional pedagogies, student assessment instruments, and textbooks so that they are all consistent with current educational reforms and proposals to reorganize schools and the teaching profession. This realignment untangles the web so that a unity of purpose can emerge. Finally, these projects are aimed at schools and teachers of predominantly underrepresented and at-risk students who most need our thoughtful attention.

We find these new initiatives in staff development programs encouraging and consistent with the theses outlined in this paper. Specifically, they address some features of school culture that might impede the progress of staff and school development, take a long-term look at school change, and aim to accelerate the learning of those students who are falling behind.

However, we acknowledge that these efforts are not nearly enough to bring about the wide-spread and substantive changes that we hoped for during the past decade of educational reform. We offer three conclusions:

1) The twin challenges of improving the educational outcomes of children at-risk and changing schools as they are currently constituted poses the major educational challenge for the next decade; 2) To even begin to address these challenges, staff development programs must be far more comprehensive and must conscientiously address the power of school culture in affecting real school change; and 3) The Accelerated School model and its Inquiry Process offer one promising means for addressing these formidable challenges.

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